



U.S. Rep. Jane Harman
Ranking Democrat, House Permanent
Select Committee on Intelligence

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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April 8, 2005

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HARMAN ANNOUNCES OPPOSITION TO CAFTA

*Joined by labor and environmental leaders,
Harman says "Not this treaty, and not now"*

WASHINGTON D.C. --- With weak labor and environmental provisions, and inadequate enforcement mechanisms, the Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) is the wrong agreement at the wrong time, Rep. Jane Harman said today at a press conference to announce her opposition to the pact.

"CAFTA's penalties for failing to enforce labor and environmental laws provide no real deterrent against abuses, and it offers no incentives to improve standards over time," Harman said today. "CAFTA actually weakens labor protections by removing an existing oversight mechanism available under our current system of trade preferences for the region."

Rep. Harman, longtime representative of the 36th Congressional District and Ranking Member of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, was joined at the Port of Los Angeles by Miguel Contreras, Executive Secretary of the LA County Federation of Labor; Joan Holtz, Chair, Sierra Club Responsible Trade Committee; David Arian, President, ILWU Local 13; Joe Radisich, President, ILWU Southern District Council; Robert Turner, International Representative, Teamsters Joint Council 42; Jim Santangelo, President, Teamsters Joint Council 42; Jesse Swanhuyser, Director, Coalition for Fair Trade and Human Rights; Wendy Wendlandt, Political Director of the National Association of State Public Interest Research Groups

"This agreement will leave workers, family farmers, the environment and communities more vulnerable while enriching and empowering corporate elites," said Contreras.

Added Holtz: "The Sierra Club is not opposed to international trade. However we do oppose trade models that fail to protect health and safety of citizens and the natural environments of our respective countries."

Dave Arian agreed. "CAFTA doesn't square with American's priorities," he said. "The foundation of our country is an economic one. Agreements like CAFTA weaken our economic base and allow America to be divided by wedge issues rather than focusing on our common priorities."

The full text of Rep. Harman's remarks from today's event is included below.

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REP. JANE HARMAN ANNOUNCES OPPOSITION TO CAFTA

March 29, 2005

Banning's Landing Community Center

Thank you all for joining us today.

I'd like to take a moment to welcome and introduce our distinguished guests:

Miguel Contreras, Executive Secretary of the LA County Federation of Labor.

Joan Holtz, Chair, Sierra Club Responsible Trade Committee

David Arian, President, ILWU Local 13

Joe Radisich, President, ILWU Southern District Council

Robert Turner, International Representative, Teamsters Joint Council 42

Jim Santangelo, President, Teamsters Joint Council 42

Jesse Swanhuysen, Director, Coalition for Fair Trade and Human Rights

Wendy Wendlandt, Political Director of the National Association of State Public Interest Research Groups

I'd also like to thank the friends of Banning's Landing Community Center for making the center available to us for this event.

Finally, I'd like to thank all the members of SEIU, ILWU, AFL-CIO the Teamsters, and the LA County Federation of Labor for joining us here today.

More than a decade ago, I stood at this port to announce my opposition to the North American Free Trade Agreement. While I'm not opposed to free trade, my position was "Not this NAFTA, and not now."

I'm proud to stand here again today with so many friends from the labor and environmental movements to announce my opposition to the Central American Free Trade Agreement – another agreement whose time has not come.

I opposed NAFTA because it was far too weak on protections for workers and the environment, and it wasn't good for California's economy.

Supporters of NAFTA argued it would create millions of good jobs, slow illegal immigration and raise living standards "from the Yukon to the Yucatan."

Well, a decade later, environmental conditions in Mexico have worsened, real wages have stagnated, and illegal immigration shows no signs of slowing. The millions of high quality jobs that were promised have failed to materialize on either side of the Rio Grande.

The broken promises of NAFTA should serve as a warning and lead me to question claims that CAFTA will do what NAFTA has not.

Our Central American neighbors have made real economic and political progress in recent years, and the US should work to re-enforce that progress.

As with NAFTA, CAFTA is a trade agreement that brings together countries with vastly different labor and environmental standards and enforcement methods.

But the uneven record of labor rights protections in CAFTA countries is a serious problem. The Departments of State and Labor have cited Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and El Salvador for failing to protect fundamental labor rights.

CAFTA's penalties for failing to enforce labor and environmental laws provide no real deterrent against future abuses, and it offers no incentives to improve standards over time.

CAFTA actually weakens labor protections by removing an existing oversight mechanism available under our current system of trade preferences for the region.

CAFTA includes NAFTA's troubling Chapter 11 provisions, which give foreign investors the right to challenge our health, safety and environmental laws.

California has been at the forefront of efforts to protect its communities from air and water pollution. Our citizens have resoundingly made environmental concerns a priority. Yet CAFTA gives foreign investors the right to challenge these laws if they have a negative effect on their bottom line.

CAFTA does not improve upon NAFTA's failed model and to me that's an unacceptable shortcoming.

Free and fair trade can lift living standards both at home and abroad, encourage technological innovation, create jobs and empower individuals. I have voted for many such agreements, while making clear that each agreement must be considered on its own merits.

I cannot support this CAFTA. Trade is not fair if desperate people are forced to work in hazardous conditions or communities are forced to bear the costs of environmental degradation

With respect to CAFTA, I echo my refrain from 10 years ago: "Not This Treaty, and Not Now."

And now I'd like to turn over the podium to Miguel Contreras.

